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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 000810

SIPDIS

DRL/IRF FOR COFSKY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2029  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: BOMB EXPLODES OUTSIDE CAIRO CHURCH

REF: A. CAIRO 806  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 451

Classified By: Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs  
Catherine Hill-Herndon for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. Key Points:

-- (SBU) At approximately 9:45 pm on May 10, a bomb exploded in a car parked near the Cathedral of the Virgin Mary (al-Azraa Miriam) in Cairo's Zeitoun neighborhood (ref A). Police found and destroyed in a controlled explosion a second bomb, also located in a parked car, at approximately 1:30 am on May 11. There were no injuries and minimal property damage.

-- (SBU) Late on May 11, Egypt's Ministry of Interior (MoI) issued a statement identifying the source of the explosion as a bomb located in a car and describing the destruction of the second device.

-- (SBU) No one has been arrested in connection with the explosion.

-- (C) According to Coptic Church officials, approximately 800 to 1000 people were inside the cathedral at the time.

-- (SBU) Police arrived quickly, evacuated the church and questioned - without detaining - a number of people in the church at the time of the blast. Police also questioned the owners of the cars. The owners, who were attending the wedding, were released after approximately four hours.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: We are not aware of any claims of responsibility for the bombs. Local commentators - without providing evidence to support the theory - suggest a link to the still unsolved February 22 bombing at the Khan al-Khalili market, which killed one French tourist (ref B). Given the demonstrated abilities of the Khan al-Khalili bombers, the suggestion of a connection seems tenuous. Most Egyptians are convinced that the target of the bombs was the crowded Cathedral, a historic church of great significance (some Copts believe the Virgin Mary appeared there in 1968) to Egypt's Copts. There is no other obvious target in the area.

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Initial Confusion  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) Although local and international media outlets quickly reported that a bomb caused the explosion, Egypt's State Information Service initially attributed the blast to a malfunctioning car battery. Late on May 11, the MoI issued a written statement describing the source of the blast as a "locally made device" concealed in a Fiat 125 automobile belonging to a "Coptic lawyer." The statement went on to say that police found a second device in another car. According to the statement, a cell phone was attached to the second

device "to be used as a detonator." The MoI said an investigation is underway.

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Coptic Church Reaction  
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¶4. (C) Soon after the explosion and during the night of May 10, a Coptic church official told us that a bomb was the cause. He reported that police responded quickly and evacuated the church. Police questioned some of the estimated 800 to 1,000 people who had been in the church, generally quizzing them on what they had seen, but did not arrest or formally detain anyone. Police paid greater attention to wedding attendee Boutros Michel Boutros, Coptic lawyer and owner of the Fiat 125 where the initial explosion occurred. Police took Boutros to a nearby police station and questioned him for approximately four hours. Police also questioned for several hours the owner of the car where the second, unexploded bomb was found. According to the church official, the police response - so far - has been professional and appropriate.

¶5. (SBU) Coptic Pope Shenouda III appeared on a local television show on May 12 to condemn the bombing and those responsible as "disloyal to Egypt and Islam." He downplayed possible sectarian motives while suggesting similarities to the February 22 Khan al-Khalili bombing.

SCOBAY